

Information for patients

Information for pregnant women and people who use drugs or alcohol

Introduction

This leaflet gives information about using drugs or alcohol during pregnancy and how it may affect your baby.

It is not meant to worry or upset you. We want to help you understand the possible effects and make sure you know where to get support.

Important: If you get withdrawal symptoms when you stop drinking alcohol or using drugs, do **not** stop suddenly. This can be dangerous for you and your baby. Speak to your GP, midwife, or drug and alcohol support service for advice.

This leaflet explains:

- Where to get help and support.
- How to stay healthy during pregnancy.
- What Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) is.
- How drugs and alcohol can affect you and your baby.
- Signs of withdrawal in newborn babies.
- Care for you and your baby after birth.

Staying healthy during pregnancy

It is important to attend all your appointments. These may include:

- Midwife appointments.
- Pregnancy scans.
- Appointments with a specialist doctor (obstetrician).

These appointments help us check that you and your baby are well.

Try to:

- Attend all appointments.
- Eat regular, healthy meals.
- Attend support appointments with Turning Point or other local services.
- Take only medicines prescribed by your doctor or treatment team.
- Avoid using street drugs.

What is Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)?

Some drugs, medicines, alcohol, and tobacco can pass through the placenta to your baby during pregnancy.

If these substances are used regularly, your baby may become used to them before birth.

After your baby is born and the umbilical cord is cut, the supply of these substances stops. Some babies may then develop **Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)**. This means they may experience withdrawal symptoms.

What happens after my baby is born?

We will do our best to keep you and your baby together.

Most babies do not need any special treatment. However, some babies may need extra checks, monitoring, or medicine. A few babies may need care in the neonatal unit.

The baby doctor (paediatrician) may recommend that you and your baby stay in hospital for at least **3 days** so your baby can be monitored for signs of withdrawal.

You will be involved in all decisions about your baby's care.

Signs of withdrawal in babies

A baby with NAS may show some of these signs:

- Being unsettled or difficult to comfort.
- Frequent sneezing.
- A high-pitched cry.
- Fast breathing.
- Shaking or trembling.
- Difficulty feeding.
- Staying awake for long periods.
- Stiff muscles.
- Being sick (vomiting).
- Diarrhoea.
- A high temperature.
- Frequent yawning.

How drugs and alcohol can affect your baby

Alcohol

Alcohol passes easily from your blood to your baby.

There is **no known safe amount of alcohol during pregnancy**, so it is safest not to drink at all.

Alcohol can cause **Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)**. This can affect a child's growth, learning, behaviour, and development.

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can also increase the risk of:

- Miscarriage.
- Premature birth.
- Your baby being smaller than expected.

Benzodiazepines

These medicines are often used for anxiety, sleep problems, or relaxation.

Examples include diazepam and temazepam.

These medicines can pass to your baby and may cause withdrawal symptoms after birth.

Your baby may need to stay in hospital for at least 3 days for monitoring.

Do not stop taking these medicines suddenly without speaking to your GP or specialist.

Cannabis

Using cannabis during pregnancy may increase the risk of:

- Miscarriage.
- Stillbirth.
- Poor growth before birth.
- Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), sometimes called cot death.

Some studies suggest children exposed to cannabis in pregnancy may have behavioural or learning difficulties later in life.

Cocaine and Crack Cocaine

Cocaine can be harmful to both you and your baby.

It can increase the risk of:

- Miscarriage.
- Heavy bleeding during pregnancy.
- Premature birth.
- Poor growth before birth.
- Low birth weight.

Babies exposed to cocaine may also be more unsettled after birth and may have feeding or sleeping difficulties.

Some babies will need a brain scan and extra monitoring.

Ecstasy and Amphetamines

Examples include ecstasy, speed, crystal meth, and ICE.

These drugs may increase the risk of:

- Problems with your baby's growth.
- Premature birth.
- High blood pressure in pregnancy.
- Problems with your baby's heart or development.

Babies may also show signs of withdrawal after birth.

Opiates

Examples include:

- Heroin.
- Codeine.
- Tramadol.
- Methadone.
- Buprenorphine.

These drugs can pass to your baby during pregnancy.

Do not stop taking prescribed opiates suddenly. Speak to your doctor or treatment team first.

Babies exposed to opiates are more likely to develop NAS and usually need at least 3 days of hospital observation after birth.

Where can I get help?

Turning Point

Support for people affected by drugs or alcohol.

Telephone: 01284 766554

Anglian Care Trust

Offers support and advice.

Self-referral available through their website.

UK Addiction Treatment Centres

Provides information and support services.

Remember

- You are not alone.
- Support is available.
- Being honest with your midwife and healthcare team helps us care for you and your baby.
- We are here to support you, not to judge you.

Questions?

If you have any questions or worries, speak to your:

- Midwife
- GP
- Obstetrician (pregnancy doctor)
- Drug and alcohol support worker

Accessibility

If you require this leaflet in a different format, please contact the patient advice and liaison service on 01284 712555 or email PALS@wsh.nhs.uk

If you would like any information regarding access to our Trust services and facilities, please visit the website for AccessAble: <https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust>



Clinical research

West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust is actively involved in clinical research. Your doctor, clinical team or the research and development department may contact you regarding specific clinical research studies that you might be interested in participating in. If you do not wish to be contacted for these purposes, please email info.gov@wsh.nsh.uk. This will in no way affect the care or treatment you receive.